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WAR OF 1812: DIPLOMACY ON THE HIGH SEAS



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Date Range: -1814 (with a small quantity of documents 1789-1807)

Content: 5,551 images

Source Library: National Archives (U.S.) and U.S. Department of State Library

Detailed Description:

In time of war the duties of the State Department have always been expanded. During the War of 1812 Congress authorized the Secretary of State to issue commissions of letters of marque and reprisal to private armed vessels permitting them to "cruise against the enemies of the United States." Owners of merchant vessels filed applications for the commissions with the State Department or with collectors of customs. Many collectors were allowed to issue to privateers, commissions received in blank from the Department of State. The collectors often sent on to the Department the original applications and forwarded periodically abstracts of the commissions they had granted. During the war the Department also issued permits for aliens to leave the U.S., and it received reports from U.S. marshals on aliens and prisoners of war in their districts, from collectors of customs and State Department agents on the impressment of seamen, and from the Department's "Secret Agents" on the movements of the British in the Chesapeake Bay area. The Department also had responsibility for negotiating the treaty at the end of the war.

This collection comprises the following files:

LETTERS RECEIVED CONCERNING LETTERS OF MARQUE, 1812-1814

These letters were chiefly from collectors of customs, requesting blanks for commissions of letter of marque and acknowledging receipt of the blanks. Enclosed with many of the collectors' letters are the applications by privateers for the commissions and abstracts of the

commissions issued. There are also applications for letters of marque made directly to the Secretary of State and a "strictly confidential" notice issued by Secretary James Monroe "by command of the President" establishing signals by which the U.S. privateers might "be able to know each other."

LETTERS RECEIVED REGARDING ENEMY ALIENS, 1812-1814

These letters were received by the State Department from U.S. marshals, enemy aliens, and others regarding the status of aliens in the U.S. and the consideration of their cases by U.S. authorities. Many of the letters contain evidence, pleas, or recommendations for the exemption of certain aliens from the regulations applicable to them.

MARSHALS' RETURNS OF ENEMY ALIENS AND PRISONERS OF WAR, 1812-1815

These returns were made to the Department by U.S. marshals. The lists usually show for each alien his name, age, and occupation; the length and places of his residence in the United States; the names of members of his family; and the date of his application for naturalization. Included are some receipts from the British Consul in Boston for prisoners turned over to him, some lists of prisoners of war delivered to marshals from U.S. ships, and a printed copy of "The Case of Alien Enemies, 1813."

REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION TO SAIL FROM THE UNITED STATES, 1812-1814

These letters request permission for ships to sail from the United States with cargo and passengers.

PASSENGER LISTS OF VESSELS

The lists are of persons authorized to sail from the U.S. They show the name and nationality of each person and (in some cases) his occupation, age, date of arrival in the U.S., complexion, and color of hair and eyes. Most of the lists are for the port of Philadelphia and were received from U.S. marshals.

CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING PASSPORTS, 1812-1814

This correspondence concerns the issuance of passports to permit departure from the U.S.

AGREEMENTS FOR THE EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS OF WAR, 1812-1813

A copy of an agreement made at Halifax, Nova Scotia, November 28, 1812, between Great Britain and the U.S. for the exchange of naval prisoners; and a copy of the agreement as revised May 12, 1813.

MISCELLANEOUS LETTERS RECEIVED CONCERNING THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS, 1812-1815

These letters were received by the President, the Secretary of State, and others from several sources—including the British Admiralty, private citizens, and impressed seamen—concerning the release of the seamen and the exchange of prisoners of war.

REPORTS OF WILLIAM LAMBERT, SECRET AGENT, 1813

His reports to the Secretary of State concerned movements of the enemy in Maryland between Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River.

MISCELLANEOUS INTERCEPTED CORRESPONDENCE, 1789-1814

This correspondence comprises (1) intercepted British military correspondence, July 16, 1812-September 10, 1813 with a list of papers; (2) correspondence of British military officers relating principally to Indian affairs on the U.S.-Canadian frontier, October 1789-October 1807; (3) intercepted correspondence of the British Foreign Office, July-November 1812; and (4) intercepted private letters, August 26, 1812-July 20, 1814. Within each of the four sections the intercepted letters are arranged chronologically.